

Slide 1: Title Slide

Good evening, and thank you for being here tonight. Let me introduce myself, my name is Belinda Ketchabaw and I am the CAO for the Township of Nairn and Hyman. My goal tonight is to provide a high-level summary of the findings from the recent environmental reports conducted by Hutchinson Environmental Sciences Ltd. Just to be clear—I'm not a scientist, but I have reviewed these reports carefully, they do contain a lot of information and I will do my best to break them down, so we can have an informed discussion about what they mean for our community.

Slide 2: Background

- Just to give you a bit of background information for those of you who may have just recently heard about this issue, the Agnew Lake Mine, located just north of the tailings management area, was active in uranium production from 1974 until it closed in the 1980s. As many of you know, uranium tailings have been a long-standing concern due to their potential environmental impacts.
 - Recently, the Ministry of Mines designated the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area to receive 18,600 cubic metres of niobium tailings from the Nova Beaucage Mine. These materials are currently being excavated from Nipissing First Nation lands and an adjacent MTO gravel pit. We were told that this material was classified as Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials, or NORM for short.
 - When we first heard about this plan in June 2024, many of us were understandably concerned. We're talking about a huge amount of material, approximately 13,000 truckloads carrying 34,000 tonnes of material—an amount that, once placed on site, would cover an area equivalent to four football fields, piled a metre high.
 - While we recognize the importance of removing these radioactive materials from Nipissing First Nation lands, we also need to ensure that this process does not create new risks to our public health or the environment and this has raised serious questions for our community.
 - What is the impact of receiving the niobium tailings and what exactly does this material contain?
 - Does this site in its current condition have an impact on the area's drinking water?
 - Does the addition of tailings to the site add to the possible contamination of ground and surface water?
 - To get a clearer picture of the environmental stability of the site and any risks to our drinking water, the Township along with the assistance of the surrounding communities of the Township of Baldwin, Township of Sables-Spanish Rivers and the Town of Espanola, commissioned three independent studies by Hutchinson Environmental Sciences Ltd. If you want to dive into the full reports, they are available on our website.
 - Hutchinson's first report, reviewed the technical and environmental performance of the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area and examined the potential implications of relocating niobium tailings to the site."
 - The second report assessed potential contaminant migration pathways to our local water sources.
 - The third report provided a review of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's Regulatory Oversight Report for Uranium Mines, Mills and Decommissioned Sites in Canada" for the year 2023. This report provided the Township with information that allowed us to submit a written submission of interference at the CNSC's Regulatory Oversight meeting as we feel that the oversight of this area is not up to what it should be.
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Slide 3: Key Findings: Contaminants of Concern

- So what did these reports uncover?
 - One of the main takeaways is that the Ministry of Mines' 2023 Annual Report to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) identifies several contaminants of concern in groundwater, surface water, soil, and sediment around the site. These include uranium, cobalt, arsenic, iron, cyanide, radium-226 and several more other heavy metals.
 - The concerning part is that many of these contaminants exceed both provincial and federal environmental quality guidelines in multiple locations. Uranium in groundwater and surface water, as well as arsenic in sediments, are particularly concerning. If these contaminants migrate toward our drinking water sources, they could pose significant risks to public health.
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Slide 4: Mapping of Contaminants

- This slide gives us a visual of where these contaminants exceed safe levels. And just to clarify- our consultants did not conduct this testing. This data comes directly from the Ministry of Mines Report to the CNSC.
- Here's what it found: To the west of the site near John Creek, there were high levels of Aluminum, Copper and Iron.
- At the West Dam, sampling showed high levels of uranium, cobalt, arsenic, Copper and Iron.
- At the Middle Dam area, sampling showed high levels of free cyanide, uranium, aluminum, cobalt, copper, cadmium, iron, lead, and nickel.
- Sampling taken at the east dam and near Ministic Creek again shows exceedences of Aluminum, Copper, Iron, Cobalt, Lead, Nickel, Zinc, and Cadmium.

“Despite these exceedances, the Ministry’s report stated that “there were no reportable events taking place at the Agnew Lake Management Area in 2023”!

We find this statement a bit hard to reconcile with what the data is actually showing us.

Slide 5: Incomplete Monitoring Programs

- Another major issue identified in the Ministry of Mine's report is the lack of a complete monitoring program for this site.
 - It was noted that there is an insufficient number of groundwater wells to assess the full extent of contamination migration as some of the groundwater wells were dry and could not be sampled.
 - And while some key contaminants were noted in the report, there is nothing further in the report that shows that the Ministry had taken further steps to investigate and/or address some of the concerning exceedances such as the uranium, radium and cyanide.
 - **So what does this mean? Well, the bottom line is that we don't have complete picture of the scale of the contamination...and that is a major problem.**
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Slide 6: Migration Pathways to Drinking Water Sources

- The Hutchinson Environmental Report also identified two primary pathways through which contaminants could potentially migrate to our drinking water sources.
- "The West Pathway involves surface water draining from the site via John Creek to the Spanish River, which eventually flows into Agnew Lake, supplying drinking water to many residents on the lake. This pathway spans approximately 130 km."
- "The East Pathway involves contaminants potentially flowing through Ministic Creek into the Spanish River, which is the main source of water for Nairn Centre's Water Treatment Plant. This pathway is much shorter, approximately 27 km."
- "In addition to these pathways, a fault line under site could allow deeper groundwater to migrate towards Agnew Lake and potentially affect Georgian Bay. These pathways are concerning because they could carry contaminants for long distances."
- **That is why this is just not a localized issue – it's something that could impact a much wider area!**

Slide 7: Map of Site – to John Creek and Agnew Lake

- You can see the site in red and from there the water drainage pathway flows into John Creek which drains to the north to Centre Creek, and eventually discharging to the upper Spanish River from there it drains south to Agnew Lake. While some contaminants and radionuclides will settle and be adsorbed over the 130 kilometres of this route, **this does not guarantee that some of these will not reach Agnew Lake.**

Slide 8: Map of Site – to Ministic Creek to Spanish River

- This map is a bit more zoomed in...the site is shown in red and the water drains east to Ministic Creek, where it flows in a south eastern direction and then drains into the Spanish River. This pathway is approximately 27 kms from the site to our water treatment plant.
 - While some of the contaminants may also settle to the bottom of the waterbody along this pathway, the studies caution that not all contaminants are mitigated this way, and their effects over time are still a big concern.
 - This backs up what we are seeing in our water testing at the water treatment plant in Nairn Centre- in fact trace amounts of all these contaminants, including uranium, cyanide, benzene, aluminum, and arsenic have already been detected in the Spanish River. **While these levels are currently below safe limits, their presence alone means we need to stay vigilant. We also need to understand will the new materials that are proposed to be brought in make the problem worse or better?**
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Slide 9: Structural Issues at the TMA

- So back in September at our last Public Meeting, we heard a lot from the two ministries about the ground cover at the site being compromised due to erosion, from the weather and ATV's using the site. This has allowed rain and runoff water to run through the tailings, which has caused the migration of these metals and radionuclides to enter the groundwater and surface water.
 - We also heard from the ministries about how the niobium tailings could help repair the erosion at the site and act as a protective barrier for the areas that are showing an exceedance of gamma dose rates and radioactivity.
 - However what wasn't emphasized is that these erosion issues have been ongoing for years due to lack of maintenance.
 - The Ministry has been aware of these problems since at least 2015, yet little has been done to address them. The reports from the Ministry to show that they were aware that there was significant erosion at the East Barrier Dyck.
 - How do we know that this erosion is having detrimental effect... well the high level of uranium concentrations in groundwater upgradient of the East Dyck and the Middle dam proves this.
 - "Unfortunately, maintenance activities, such as erosion repairs, have not been adequately addressed, which increases the risks of contamination spreading to local water sources."
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Slide 10: Regulatory Oversight & Transparency Issues

- Another major concern that these reports highlight is the low level of oversight provided by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC). Their 2023 regulatory report does not contain enough site-specific detail to verify their claims that site conditions are 'satisfactory'. The report also fails to acknowledge the contaminant exceedances in the ground water and surface water, as well as the deteriorating condition of the site's cover and other infrastructure.
 - While the CNSC's staff have made a statement at the Commission's Regulatory Meeting on January 29, 2025, that the proposed project to bring in the Niobium has been paused until they are satisfied that the Ministry's plan is safe and their concerns are addressed. **Unfortunately, their track record on oversight does little to ease our concerns.**
 - Additionally, the Ministry of Mines has yet to release the promised environmental monitoring reports and risk assessments, even though they assured us back in September 2024 that it would be forthcoming. This length of time raises some significant red flags for the municipalities, not only does it undermine our confidence in how the site is being managed, it is also raising concerns that we do not accurately understand the risks that this site has historically been causing and how the materials that are being brought in will affect an already fragile situation.
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Slide 11: Implications for the Township and surrounding areas

- These findings are very concerning for our communities, particularly with regard to our drinking water sources. While there is no direct evidence that contaminants have reached Agnew Lake, trace amounts of these contaminants have been detected in water samples taken from the Spanish River. Currently, the levels of contaminants found are below the allowable limits, but their presence in the river means we need to take this seriously and continue monitoring to ensure that these levels do not rise.

Slide 10: Recommendations for Action

Moving forward, we must work together to fully understand how far these contaminants have spread and push for action. Council has discussed several options, including the possibility of conducting independent water testing at Agnew Lake and Ministic Creek. At the same time, we are in discussions with the Ontario Clean Water Agency about expanding our water sampling efforts at the Spanish River Water Treatment Plant to determine the presence and concentration of radioactive elements.

It is essential that we continue to advocate for improved groundwater and surface water monitoring at the site to ensure we have accurate, transparent, and comprehensive data. Additionally, we need to advocate for immediate repairs to the East Barrier Dyke to contain the contamination caused by erosion.

We will keep pressing the Ministry for answers and for the release of data that demonstrates a safe rehabilitation plan for the site and is the materials that they want to bring in safe.

We will continue working alongside our neighboring municipalities to keep residents informed through public statements and additional information sessions. **Protecting our community's health and drinking water remains our top priority, and we must stand together to demand the answers and solutions we need.**

As I mentioned earlier, all these reports are available on our website for those who would like to read these reports in full. Our website is www.nairncentre.ca, under the Community Tab you will find the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area. This presentation will also be uploaded in the next few days.

Thank you.
